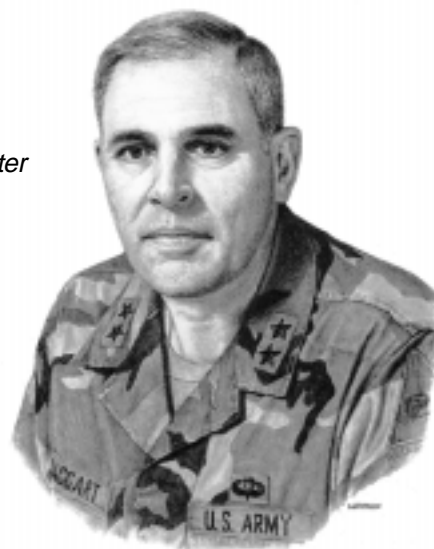


COMMANDER'S HATCH

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Mentoring — A Critical Element in Leadership Development

The Army is recognized around the world for its exceptional leader development programs. No other army has a system equal to ours. We have made great strides in counseling our subordinates to help them improve their performance. We are indeed very good. But the fact is, turbulence in the Army has created the need for a more personal approach to taking care of people.

The knowledge, skill, and experiential requirements placed on leaders today may well exceed the capacity of our formal education system to develop future leaders capable of dealing with the complex problems they will face.

As the Army grows smaller, we require our soldiers to perform increasingly more complex tasks, often in jobs for which they have insufficient experience or training. We ask our soldiers to work more efficiently and to produce quality work in diverse areas, like digital operations and experimentation on future force structures, on which precious little precedence exists.

It is up to all of us to give our subordinate leaders the best possible chance for success. Clearly, one of the easiest ways to do this is through mentoring. The personal mentorship between senior and junior leaders is essential in filling the information gap. Mentorship provides another avenue to help motivate, educate, and guide quality people to higher levels of performance.

Mentoring may be the critical missing key to help compress the learning curve of young leaders. In today's world, there is much to know and so little time to learn it that mentoring may be the best way to ensure professional development and survival on the battlefield. The mentor can help his subordinates sort through information overload and surface what is really important.

Mentorship has a self-perpetuating effect as well. Leaders who have been well mentored tend to become great mentors themselves. The bond of trust and confidence that results from a mentoring relationship lasts a lifetime. Mentoring provides a unique opportunity for young, upcoming leaders to have a permanent, personal linkage with experienced senior officers who have demonstrated professional competence, outstanding leadership, and intellectual ability.

The best mentoring comes from a personal commitment between the senior and junior, rather than through some type of assignment process. Mentoring may well occur outside of normal command relationships or branches. In fact, mutual trust and confidence must exist between the mentor and those whom he mentors long before a permanent mentoring relationship begins.

Mentoring may take several forms. It may be strictly related to branch issues, advanced warfighting concepts, or

through intellectual engagement. The subjects that can be discussed are unlimited, ranging from officership to theoretical constructs. It is up to the mentor to decide which areas are ripe for exploration and for those mentored to seek information which meets their specific needs.

Mentoring can be transformational for both the mentor and those mentored. Each learns from the other as they work together over the course of time. For the mentor, it is a way to influence the progress of bright, young leaders. Collective wisdom gained from years of experience is passed from senior to junior leaders as a bridge between the past and the future. The mentor gets the pleasure of watching young leaders grow and progress far beyond the level that could have been achieved otherwise. Those who are mentored learn, grow, and mature.

The mentor also gains access to what subordinates are thinking and insight on what is working well and what isn't. The mentor will gain invaluable and honest feedback from those who make the organization work. The mentor can use those who are mentored to help impart new ideas and ways of doing business throughout the organization and beyond. Mentoring provides both security and courage to those mentored. Security occurs because there is someone

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with whom to check signals. Courage comes from knowledge.

The mentor provides focus for the natural curiosity of young leaders to learn and explore the various components of soldiering. The mentor serves as a guide to help young leaders gain the most from beneficial experiences while helping them avoid the pitfalls. The mentor can teach the art forms essential to the application of advanced tactics, battle command, and a thousand other equally important topics. The mentor can expose young officers to expert knowledge on the subtleties of operational art and strategic thought. And perhaps most importantly, the

mentor can model the values and warfighting spirit so important for the mounted force and the Army.

Mentoring brings for both parties exhilaration and exhaustion. There is no greater satisfaction than teaching or learning something new and useful. However, considerable energy must be extended to challenge and teach even a small group of bright, young leaders; for those mentored, there is an expectation of performance to a higher standard.

Mentoring offers unparalleled opportunities now to build the mounted force of the future. If you are a battalion

commander and are not mentoring several promising young officers, you are behind the power curve already. Mentoring may be the single easiest way to develop our young leaders. But to do so, each of you must be willing to commit the time necessary to do it right, and to set the conditions so that your young leaders will seek you out as their mentor.

Mentoring is critical for growing future mounted warfighters. It is up to us to provide the guidance and inspiration to give them the tools to do in the 21st Century what we did in Desert Storm.

ON THE WAY!